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Off to College with August and Ana: Social Change and the Reconstitution of Feminine Norms at Augustana College in the Postwar Period, 1945-1962

Abstract

This project examines the changing demographics and culture surrounding higher education in the United States in the period following the Second World War and the relationship to normative constructions of femininity at Augustana College between 1945 and 1962. The college used a variety of means to reconstitute feminine norms, including social and sexual control and ritualized expressions of heterogamy, to construct a rigid femininity for women students. This allowed the college to reassert its norms and values in a changing world and to create continuity with the past. The Augustana Coed of the postwar period was white, northern European, middle-class, and asexually heterogamous. These norms constrained higher education for women within known parameters.

INTRODUCTION

It was a common axiom among Augustana College students of the postwar period to say that a woman student was not truly a coed until she had been kissed by a man beneath the college's bell tower.¹ Sometimes this was said to happen at midnight, accompanied by the ringing off the bell. Sometimes it occurred as a part of fraternity social events. Whatever the formulation, the persistence of this tradition on campus and in the language of students demonstrates that it was performing some important cultural work for the college community. Just what that work was and why it was important specifically at this time is a question which this project will answer.

In the postwar period, social and cultural change on American college and university campuses caused many institutions to seek a redefinition of their role within the world of higher education and within postwar society more broadly. An important way in which these institutions reconfigured their identity was through the redefinition of gendered norms and social roles related to femininity.

¹"Co-ed" short for "coeducational", slang for a woman college student for much of the 20th century.

Women's and Gender Studies scholar Karen Tice claims that "divergent notions of nation, region, markets, race, ethnicity, cultural identity, class, and sexuality have historically been mapped onto women's bodies."² So while norms can help to construct identity in any number of ways, it seems that the image a society constructs of its women is often the focus of extra attention, particularly in times of social change. The period, 1945-1962, saw both material and ideological changes to the world of higher education. Increasingly, a college education was accessible to a more diverse group of people. The number of women attending college more than doubled between 1940 and 1960, a change now often overshadowed by the much larger increase in women attending college in the 1970's and 1980's. In addition, many educators and public commentators began to see college educated women as more central to the economic and social wellbeing of the nation.

In the face of changes both in the national culture and on its own campus, Augustana College sought a redefinition of itself through the reconstitution of normative feminine behavior. The college achieved this purpose through ritualized displays of femininity and rigorous control of the sexual activity of its women students. The Augustana Coed was to embody professional and scholastic achievement, Christian standards of behavior, and a curiously asexual heterogamy. The increasing presence of women at the college, in numbers and status, was the most meaningful and lasting change to take place at Augustana College. Accordingly, the construction of collegiate femininity was one of the most important sites for reconstructing the identity of Augustana College in the postwar period.

SOCIAL CHANGE AND NEW NORMS

²Karen W. Tice, "Queens of Academe: Campus Pageantry and Student Life." *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 250.

Demographic change contributed significantly to the changing culture of higher education in the postwar period. Between 1940 and 1960, college enrollment in the United States increased from 1.5 to 3.6 million. Growth was greater among male students, a 160% increase for men versus 118% for women.³ This meant that, while the number of women attending college was greater than ever before, the actual gender gap increased from a ratio of 3:2 in 1940 to just under 5:3 in 1960.⁴ Nevertheless, the increase in total number of women attending college meant that postwar American society was forced to delineate the social role of a growing population of white middle class college educated women. This delineating was accomplished largely through normative means.

The postwar period was a time of ostensibly contradictory trends and countermanding sets of social norms for America's collegiate women. Between 1940 and 1960, the female adult labor force increased from 13 million to 16.5 million.⁵ This increase occurred mainly among white married women, many with college educations. While women of color and unmarried women did work at increasingly higher rates after 1945, these groups had traditionally high levels of workforce participation. Instead, the phenomenon of greater workforce participation among white married women accounts for much of the increase in workforce participation among women more generally, from 12.5% in 1940 to 29.8% in 1960.⁶ This change was especially pronounced among older women in the 45+ age range. It is important to note as well that workforce participation among women had been trending positively for decades since at least the 1890's. However, this trend accelerated in the postwar period.

³Dongbin Kim, and John L. Rury. "The Changing Profile of College Access: The Truman Commission and Enrollment Patterns in the Postwar Era." *History of Education Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Fall 2007). 304.

⁴Dongbin Kim, and John L. Rury. "The Changing Profile of College Access", 317.

⁵Linda Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 21.

⁶Linda Eisenman, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965*. 22.

At the same time that women were working outside the home with greater frequency than ever before, social factors related to marriage and childbirth drew women to the domestic sphere. Starting after the war, the average age at marriage dropped precipitously from a pre-war high of 26.7 for men and 23.3 for women to 22.6 and 20.4 respectively in 1951.⁷ The marriage rate increased to 118 marriages per 1000, a record high, and remained high throughout the period. The birth rate also increased dramatically from 86 births per 1,000 in 1945 to 102 per 1,000 in 1946.⁸ Several factors drove this change, the most immediate of which was the end of the Second World War in 1945. The return of millions of young men from military service to “normal” life introduced hundreds of thousands of potential marriage partners into an environment which had been deprived of them and encouraged many in prolonged engagements to seek marriage at this juncture. Scholars also contend that the experience of war and the geopolitical uncertainty of the postwar world caused people to desire the stability and comparative safety of marriage.⁹ The early marriage trend also owes something to the Great Depression which had caused many to forgo marriage and children for economic reasons. It was thus with the cultural memory of a less prosperous time that many young people decided to marry and have children with greater frequency and at younger ages.

It is significant that these two trends, workforce participation and early marriage, were thought of as juxtaposed to one another as it demonstrates complexity and diversity of postwar social norms, especially those which pertained to white middle-class college educated women. These women, scholar Linda Eisenmann finds, made decisions about when to marry, when to attend college, and when to work for varied and complex reasons. The tension here is between what Eisenmann in *Higher Education for*

⁷Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 42.

⁸Linda Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965*, 28.

⁹ Linda Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965*. And Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*.

Women in the Postwar Period refers to as “cultural ideology” and “economic ideology.” *Cultural ideology* imagined a kind of idealized postwar family and home life where the role of the woman was clear as a wife, mother, and homemaker. But other cultural forces dominated as well and cultural attitudes gradually shifted to accommodate the working mother. Additionally, women increasingly found fulfillment and meaning in cultural activities outside the home especially in community involvement and political activism. Organizations such as the League of Women Voters and the Young Women’s Christian Association engaged a diverse cross-section of women in a variety of civic endeavors. Overall, idealization of domesticity was not uniform nor was it necessarily the dominant form of normative femininity. By contrast, *economic ideology* pushed women to work. While cultural attitudes of the time generally held that “women should be at home whenever possible,”¹⁰ a growing number of commentators saw women’s contribution to the workforce as important to the prosperity of society. A 1957 report of Columbia University’s National Manpower Council, entitled *Womanpower*, stated that “without (women’s) presence in the labor force we could neither produce and distribute the goods nor provide the educational, health, and other social services which characterize American society.”¹¹ In this way, the national wellbeing was tied to women’s workforce participation, especially among white middle class college educated women.¹² Although social norms created conflicting messages for women about college education, the general trend in this period was that women would attend college in increasing numbers from 1945 to 1965.

THE POSTWAR AUGUSTANA

¹⁰ Linda Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965*, 27.

¹¹ Linda Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965*, 24.

¹² Linda Eisenmann, “Postwar Gender Expectations and Realities,” in *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965*. 11-42.

In the context of this changing environment, Augustana College dealt with its own set of unique challenges to the status quo. Augustana College was a private liberal arts college in Rock Island, Illinois founded in 1860 as a Swedish-American Lutheran seminary. Throughout the period 1945-1962, the student body experienced demographic shifts especially with respect to gender. During the war, as was the case at colleges and universities across the country, the number and proportion of women students increased dramatically to compensate for the loss of college age men to military service. The percentage of women students at Augustana dropped significantly in the immediate aftermath of the war, from a wartime high of 70% to a low of 33% soon after.¹³ However, this had more to do with an increase in the number of men than a decrease in the number of women. Enrollment among women did drop slightly, but the decrease, as was the case elsewhere, did not mark a retreat from higher education for women. The ground gained would be held and built upon in later years. By 1962, women made up 49.5% of the student body.

Of race it is perhaps sufficient, though far from satisfying, to state that in the period under examination, being an Augustana student was synonymous with being white. Students of color were anomalous at the historically white Augustana and not in this period emblematic of any actual trend. If any growth in racial or ethnic diversity occurred, the college did not deem it significant enough to note in its records. The President's Reports of Augustana College, which provided information on the gender, religious affiliation, and state of origin of all its students, did not note race or ethnicity.¹⁴ In fact, no entity of the college appears to have gathered information on the race of its students, and from this silence we can infer much.

¹³Augustana College Catalog 1944-1962, (Augustana College, 1944-1962), From the Augustana Institution Book Collection, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

¹⁴Conrad Bergendoff, "Report of the President of Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois, 1954-1954," *Augustana Bulletin* 50, no. 5 (July 1955). From the Augustana Institution Book Collection, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

Even if we are to consider diversity within and among European Americans, there is evidence to suggest that the ethnic makeup of students did not change much in that regard either. Using religious affiliation as a proxy for ethnic identity, we can see that there was little-to-no change in the college's historically Lutheran composition. Lutheran students according to the college catalog and the president's reports consistently made up 55-60% of the student body from 1945 to 1962.¹⁵ The remainder of students fell mostly into a handful of major Christian denominations. Additionally, the home states of Augustana students remained concentrated in the upper Midwest,¹⁶ a region heavily populated with German and Scandinavian Americans who have historically been largely Lutheran or another denomination of protestant. This is not a perfect proxy. It is only as strong as the connection between Protestantism and Americans of Northern European descent. Yet it demonstrates regardless that the Augustana of 1962 likely looked much the same as the Augustana of 1945 in terms of religious, ethnic, and cultural identity.

The reality was that Augustana's racial, ethnic, and gender composition did not radically change aside from a slow and stable increase in women's enrollment after 1953. However, the perception of change is more significant in this case than change itself. Perhaps no one was more concerned with the changing face of the institution than President of the College, Conrad Bergendoff (1935-1962). Bergendoff, an Augustana College graduate of the Class of 1915, an ordained minister of the Augustana Lutheran Synod¹⁷, and a holder of a degree in church history from the University of Chicago, was very concerned with the nature of the college as a Christian institution. A believer in the private religious model of higher education, he wrote in 1948 that the purpose of an Augustana education was "to

¹⁵Augustana College Catalog 1944-1962, (Augustana College, 1944-1962).

¹⁶Augustana College Catalog 1944-1962, (Augustana College, 1944-1962).

¹⁷The Augustana Lutheran Synod was folded into the Lutheran Church in America in 1962 and eventually the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1988.

develop a liberal arts curriculum which interprets Christian truth to the needs of the day.”¹⁸ Over Bergendoff’s vocal objections, leaders of the Augustana Synod voted in 1948 to sever Augustana College from its Lutheran seminary. Bergendoff felt that if separated, “neither the college nor the seminary will be able to witness powerfully against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places.”¹⁹ The seminary would continue to reside on the campus of Augustana with its buildings being operated separate from the college. Bergendoff would retire in 1962, the same year that plans were put in place to move the seminary permanently to Chicago.

Though Augustana lost some of its character as a religious college, the liberal arts component of the college’s educational model remained in place. In 1954, Bergendoff remarked that “after thorough study” the college had “decided against introducing a home economics department, but certain courses would be desirable as in home-making.”²⁰ The 1947 Truman Commission Report on higher education had recommended, as a part of a general expansion of higher education in the United States, that higher education become more vocational and specialized in nature. Accordingly, many educators of women experimented with vocational home economics education at Smith, Vassar, and Connecticut College though these rarely lasted. Augustana followed the general trend of liberal arts colleges by briefly experimenting, but ultimately rejecting, home economics as a field of study worth additional resources. Thus, the move toward home economics education did not reach Augustana as fully as it did at some junior colleges. This meant that Augustana, rather than adopt a more vocational model of education for its women, would continue to provide much the same education, at least in theory, for both men and

¹⁸Conrad Bergendoff, “President’s Report 1947-1948,” (Augustana College and Theological Seminary, Rock Island, Illinois). From the Augustana Institution Book Collection, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

¹⁹Conrad Bergendoff, “President’s Report 1946-1947,” *Augustana Bulletin* 42, no. 4 (June 1947): 18.

²⁰Conrad Bergendoff, “Report of the President of Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois, 1953-1954,” *Augustana Bulletin* 49, no. 7 (July 1954).

women. The desire to retain the college's model of coeducational Christian liberal arts instruction meant that the cultural work of reconstituting femininity would have to be done through other means.

The effect of changing postwar conditions at Augustana College was in creating a general sense of unease toward the future. The increasing number of women students, both locally and nationally, meant that women were more visible on American college campuses. This change created unease surrounding these women's social role in postwar society. Augustana was also dealing with its own identity crisis as a result of the loss of its Swedish Lutheran roots. At the same time, the college was defending its educational philosophy from external challenges. The college was in need of a cultural site for generating stability and reinforcing its norms and values. Through the reconstitution of feminine norms, it could achieve stability while also prescribing its own visions of gendered norms in a time where such norms were unclear and subject to change.

RECONSTITUTION OF FEMININE NORMS: SOCIAL AND SEXUAL CONTROL

Throughout the first half of the 20th century as sex became increasingly public and increasingly tied to youth culture, parental and adult authorities had engaged in what Beth L. Bailey calls "sexual control."²¹ The goal was to enforce 19th century notions of sexuality by preventing sexual contact between youth of opposite genders. The most effective means of achieving this end was in creating logistical challenges for young people attempting to engage in sex, either through limiting contact between young men and young women or through forcing such contact to take place in public spaces, thus limiting the opportunity for intimacy. Often such strategies focused on limiting the access of young

²¹Beth L. Bailey, "Sex Control", in *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 77-96.

men to young women. These regimes of sexual control, highly systematized and highly developed, are well documented at Augustana College.

The increasing presence of women students drove the college's need to restrict their educational experience through control of their sexual lives. The expansion of the women student population at Augustana can be divided into three periods. The first, 1945-1948, was a result of the war and of the rapid expansion in enrollment which came after. The second period, a levelling off from 1948-1953, was an intentional policy decision made by the college. After 1953, the number of women would expand gradually. Bergendoff's annual report of 1946-1947, he remarked that the college had limited enrollment "to those we could place in campus residences,"²² a policy which was in place until at least the early 1950's. Ostensibly, this was due to a lack of campus housing as Bergendoff noted. Women students were not permitted to live off campus unless they were from the community. Men students were subject to no such restriction. In fact, the college virtually depended on the ability of a significant number of men students to live off campus due to the massive enrollment increases at Augustana and the attendant housing shortages in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The reason that women students were not allowed to live off campus was not stated in the President's Report of that year. Rather, college administration seemed to take for granted that such policy was in the best interests of women students. When the college was unable to provide on-campus housing for women students, it decided to restrict the number of women admitted.

This decision reveals several pieces of information about the values of the college. In preventing women students from living off campus, the college ensured that the maximum number of women possible lived in all-women dorms. In these dorms, women students were subject to strict rules regarding their behavior and freedom of movement. Strict curfews kept women students cloistered in

²²Conrad Bergendoff, "President's Report 1946-1947," *Augustana Bulletin* 42, no. 4 (June 1947): 6.

dorms during nights, 8 p.m. Monday – Thursday for freshmen and 10 p.m. for upperclassmen. These were relaxed during the weekend but still did not permit women to be out of their dorms later than midnight. If a woman wished to leave campus after 7 p.m., she was required to fill out a “leave slip” at the front desk of her dorm. Permission to stay out overnight had to be obtained through the Dean of Women and required parental approval. The college also refused to give overnight permissions to women on nights of formal dances. While not stated, it can be readily inferred that this was to prevent any sexual activity which might occur post-dance. Hours during which men were permitted to visit women in their dorms were also quite strict, 4 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Monday – Thursday, again relaxed over the weekends. Men were also not permitted in women’s rooms, only in the more public dorm lounges.²³

The highly developed and complicated nature of these rules demonstrates that much care was put into writing them. The discrepancy in length between rules for men’s and women’s dorms indicates much greater focus on the conduct of women (2.5 pages for men in the 1946 student handbook versus just over 6 pages for women.) Finally, the fact that such rules were written at all demonstrates (1) concern about the behavior of young women attributable to broader cultural values and (2) that such behaviors were taking place at Augustana, thus requiring rules to delineate what was acceptable and what was unacceptable.

It must be reiterated; it was the policy of the college to ensure that as many women as possible lived in this arrangement. The only exception was for women students from the area who presumably would be allowed to live at home under parental supervision. The purpose of such policies was to ensure that, via the doctrine of *in loco parentis*, Augustana could control the social and sexual behavior

²³Student Handbook of Augustana, 1946-1947, (Augustana College, 1946). From the Augustana Institution Book Collection, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois. 18-27.

of its women students. This mirrored the gatekeeping role of many mid-20th century parents who also frequently limited the sexual and social activity of their daughters by imposing curfews, denying propositioning men access, and providing “supervised privacy.”²⁴

When it became apparent that the prohibition on women living off campus would create housing shortages for Augustana’s rapidly expanding student body, the college decided to restrict the number of women accepted. This demonstrates two points. First, when faced with a housing shortage, the college chose to prioritize admittance of men over women. In part this may have been viewed as a patriotic decision. In the Fall of 1946, Augustana accepted 638 veterans, over 95% of whom were men. This patriotic decision however belies the colleges own priorities. Second, when faced with the option of educating fewer women versus relaxing controls on the sexual and social lives of women, the college chose to educate fewer women.

Even when more women’s housing was constructed in the 1950’s and admissions restrictions discarded, the college constructed new housing in a way that prioritized social and sexual control. By 1950, partly as a result of admissions policy and partly as a result of the massive postwar influx of men students, the percentage of women had fallen from a wartime high of nearly 70% to around 34% in 1947.²⁵ While this was not far off from the 3:2 ratio which President Bergendoff considered ideal, he nonetheless regretted having to turn away a large number of women applicants.²⁶ As early as 1950, he reflected, “a new women’s dormitory is... a real need.”²⁷ The years between 1947 and 1954 recount frequent financial struggles as the college attempted to expand in size and student population. In 1953,

²⁴Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 84.

²⁵Augustana College Catalog 1944-1962, (Augustana College, 1944-1962).

²⁶Conrad Bergendoff, “President’s Report 1949-1950,” *Augustana Bulletin* 45, no. 6 (June 1950): 4.

²⁷Conrad Bergendoff, “President’s Report 1949-1950,” *Augustana Bulletin* 45, no. 6 (June 1950): 4.

the President's Report estimated that over 2 million dollars were necessary to build just those facilities deemed vital to the function of the college. This included \$400,000 for a new women's dormitory.²⁸

In 1954, the college acquired 26 acres of land to its south from a private donor. Additionally, in that year longtime Augustana benefactor, Elsa Westerlin, died leaving the college \$500,000 of her estate.²⁹ With a new site and new funds, the college immediately began drafting plans to build a women's dorm. Facilities for 150 women were completed by the fall of 1957 with facilities for an additional 150 still under construction. President Bergendoff's eventual plan called for dining facilities, a gym, a swimming pool, tennis courts, and outdoor space. In no uncertain terms, Bergendoff desired the creation of an entirely separate "Women's Campus," stating "I have long hoped that we might find it possible at Augustana to develop a women's campus which would combine something of the privacy of a girl's school with the advantages of co-education."³⁰ By 1962 Westerlin Hall, which never quite reached Bergendoff's lofty expectations, could house 450 women. The physical location of the new site factored into the decision to build women's facilities there. Whereas most campus buildings at the time sat on the flood plain of the Mississippi River, the new acquisition sat on the ridge behind campus and could only be reached by travelling through a heavily forested and hilly area. Even Bergendoff conceded it would "require a little stretch of the imagination" to see the new facilities as a "natural part of the campus"³¹ due to its physical separation from campus proper. To this day, the hilltop area of campus where Westerlin resides is referred to by students and faculty as "upper campus." Curiously, the college had considered building a women's dormitory on available land closer to the center of campus but

²⁸Conrad Bergendoff, "President's Report 1952-1953," *Augustana Bulletin* 48, no. 6 (June 1953): 21.

²⁹Conrad Bergendoff, "Report of the President of Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois, 1953-1954," *Augustana Bulletin* 49, no. 7 (July 1954).

³⁰Conrad Bergendoff, "Report of the President of Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois, 1953-1954," *Augustana Bulletin* 49, no. 7 (July 1954).

³¹Conrad Bergendoff, "Report of the President of Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois, 1954-1954," *Augustana Bulletin* 50, no. 5 (July 1955).

rejected the possibility.³² The distance of the new women's facilities relative to the rest of campus better served President Bergendoff's desire to create a separate campus for women. The college chose to postpone the building of new women's facilities until it could ensure greater spatial separation. In effect the college chose to educate fewer women in these years rather than see women live in closer proximity to their male classmates or to relinquish control of women's social and sexual behavior by allowing them to live in off-campus housing.

Art and architectural historian, Carla Yanni, argues that the growth of coeducational institutions required college officials to devise new ways of organizing space on campus. Though writing about college campuses of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Yanni's observation is nevertheless relevant to the postwar environment of Augustana where women students were moving away from the margins of campus life and into the center. In what she refers to as the "coed's predicament", women's dorms were both signs of progress and means of control. "Residence halls for women," she contends, "added permanent structures on campus, which granted greater visibility, but the need for monumental structures to protect the young women demonstrated they were still second-class citizens."³³ While Augustana in the late 1940's already had women's dorms, more women required new facilities which served both as testament to progress for women's education at Augustana and as means of enforcing gendered norms.

Augustana College was thus not the first to utilize women's dormitories as a means of control. Yanni's account of the University of Michigan's Martha Cook Building highlights how architecture was used to marginalize women students and reinforce their second-class status within the university. The

³²Conrad Bergendoff, "Report of the President of Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois, 1954-1954," *Augustana Bulletin* 50, no. 5 (July 1955).

³³Carla Yanni, "The Coed's Predicament: The Martha Cook Building at the University of Michigan." *Buildings & Landscapes* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 26.

Cook Building, built in 1915, had a single main entrance to limit access as well as semi-public common rooms to allow for supervised mixed gender socialization. We know from the Augustana handbooks that Westerlin Hall had both of these features. There are also clear parallels in the way contemporary authorities described the purpose of the two buildings. The Cook Building's benefactor, William Cook, felt that "the social life of the university should be dominated, led, moulded [sic], and perfected by the charm of the Martha Cook Building."³⁴ After a similar fashion, while Westerlin was under construction, Bergendoff envisioned it as "a center of much of the social life of the campus."³⁵ Whereas Yanni argues that the Cook Building "was intended as a quasi-domestic retreat within the setting of a masculinist campus,"³⁶ Bergendoff wrote that the new building should allow women students to "live together, eat together, play together in their own environment."³⁷ Westerlin Hall and the proposed Women's Campus thus fit into the established concept of controlling women's behavior through architectural and spatial means.

The college's desire to control the social and sexual lives of its women students through these means was rarely explicitly stated. Vague statements that women students should "live together, eat together, (and) play together" do not themselves provide enough information to conclusively demonstrate this kind of paternalistic control. Yet, viewed within the context of the college's well-established desire to limit contact between men and women students specifically, it becomes apparent that the Women's Campus was conceived of to constrain the social activity of women to fit a prescribed mold of acceptable behavior for the white middle class coeds of Augustana College.

³⁴Carla Yanni, "The Coed's Predicament," 35.

³⁵Conrad Bergendoff, "Report of the President of Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois, 1954-1954," *Augustana Bulletin* 50, no. 5 (July 1955).

³⁶Carla Yanni, "The Coed's Predicament," 42.

³⁷Conrad Bergendoff, "Report of the President of Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois, 1953-1954," *Augustana Bulletin* 49, no. 7 (July 1954).

RECONSTITUTION OF FEMININE NORMS: COURTSHIP AND TRADITION

Whereas sexual control served the reconstitution of norms through negative restriction, the college also promoted gendered norms through positive prescription. Through a series of courtship traditions, the postwar period saw the advancement of heterogamy as an appropriate expression of womanhood. It has already been established that the college was interested in exerting control over the when and where of women's sexuality. Postwar courtship traditions demonstrated that the college also sought to control the content and context of relationships between its students as well. As women students became increasingly less peripheral to higher education more generally and to Augustana specifically, it became necessary to redefine the role of women students in a way that was deeply tied to the college's norms and values. To this purpose, a number of traditions and ritualized behaviors were explicitly promoted in such sites as the student handbooks and a number of campus beauty pageants.

The idea that tradition is invented as a response to social change is articulated in the 1983 book *The Invention of Tradition* by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. The basic theory is that societies and groups respond to changing social conditions by creating new traditions (patterns of symbolic and ritualistic behavior) which serve to connect the present to an imagined past. The phrase 'new tradition' is not a contradiction. Hobsbawm and Ranger hold that traditions which have come about in the modern era largely have a fabricated past. They are designed to 'feel' old, to pass themselves off as having origins in a distant past despite frequently being inventions of the modern era with only vague reference to a historical past. In this way, Hobsbawm and Ranger argue, traditions create continuity from past to present in the minds of a populace and therefore create a sense of stability by contrasting the 'old' with the new. It is for this reason that invented traditions are most often found at times and places within history "when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old'

traditions had been designed.”³⁸ Hobsbawm and Ranger therefore define invented traditions as “responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past based on quasi-obligatory repetition.”³⁹ It is significant that the authors were mainly concerned with those traditions which attended the rise of nationalism and the task of nation building in the 19th century. However, their framework is nevertheless relevant for understanding tradition in any imagined community experiencing rapid change.

There are, according to Hobsbawm and Ranger, at least three basic purposes which invented traditions might serve, those which (1) establish social cohesion and membership in imagined communities (2) legitimize authority and institutions and (3) socialize beliefs, values, and conventions.⁴⁰ Using this categorization to understand the traditions relevant to Augustana College in the postwar period, we find that they are mainly of the third type. As we have already seen, the college used detailed and stringent codes of conduct to socialize values and conventions related to proper behavior for women students. Now we shall see how traditions were used to fulfill this same purpose.

An important site for the inculcation of these norms and values as well as the dissemination of traditions supporting them was the college’s student handbook. Given that this was the perhaps the only place students might be able to access the college’s extensive rules for student conduct, it is likely that every student would have had one. Assuming their universal distribution, the handbooks are an excellent place to examine the college’s efforts to disseminate feminine norms.

For much of the postwar period, the student handbooks were compiled and edited by a body of students and faculty called the Social Committee. Student members of the committee were appointed

³⁸Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (University Press, Cambridge, 1984), 4.

³⁹Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 2.

⁴⁰Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 9.

by student government, and faculty members included both the Dean of Men and the Dean of Women. Though the committee had been responsible for the annual publishing of the booklet for years, the postwar period marked a time when greater care was taken regarding this annual task. Before and during the war, the handbook underwent only moderate revisions from year to year, appearing much the same in form and content for many years in a row. The handbooks of this period were bland, practical affairs with small print, few if any illustrations, and formal text. In the postwar however, the handbook changed frequently with, at a minimum, a new cover and new art nearly every year in addition to a constant rearrangement and revision of the contents. These frequent changes demonstrate that more thought was being given to the booklet's annual publication and that, for at least a small number of students and faculty, the task was an important one. For these reasons, the handbooks are important to understanding what norms and values the college wished to promote.

This change in approach was also a deliberate one. In a meeting in early 1946, the Social Committee had decided to make significant revisions stating, "All the committee agreed that the book ought to be revised in content, make-up, and style; in short that it ought to be made an attractive and useful guide that students will read."⁴¹ The timing of this endeavor is very significant for our own understanding of it. The Social Committee was making its decisions in the face of a massive increase in enrollment in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War which, though it would run its course by about 1951, was nevertheless significant for those that attended Augustana in those few years. The changes made to the handbooks were therefore informed by the changes occurring on campus as perceived by the committee. One important change made was to target the handbook more explicitly toward incoming students. While some students who attended Augustana in 1945 and 1946 were

⁴¹Janice Wallin, Secretary-Treasurer, Minutes of the Social Committee, February 26, 1946, Box 1, in MSS 52 Social Committee 1939-1948, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

returning to complete an education put on hold by the war, many hundreds of students were stepping onto campus for the first time. It was therefore important that the handbook do the work of integrating these bloated freshman classes into the postwar Augustana and disseminating the college's values through the promotion of ritualized behaviors that especially reinforced the college's vision of white middle class femininity. In this way, the reconstitution of feminine identity was an important part of the college's reaction to change.

Several of the traditions promoted by the handbook authors were related to ideas of courtship and dating. In the 1946-1947 handbook, the first to be published in the new style, a telling passage first appears which will persist in nearly unchanged form in almost every college handbook into the 1960's, the Bell Tower tradition. Inspired by Swedish structures of similar design, this freestanding wooden bell tower had been a fixture of the campus landscape since its construction in 1935. It quickly became a symbol deeply tied to the identity of the college, one which was important to the dissemination of gendered norms at Augustana. The basic sketch of the Bell Tower tradition was presented as follows.

"THE BELL TOWER... the symbol of Augie's victories. It stands importantly in the middle of our rambling campus. And no girl is a co-ed until she has been kissed beneath the tall, proud spire of the Swedish Bell Tower."⁴²

Under the guise of providing freshmen students with helpful hints which might help them to better integrate into college life, the editors of the handbook were transmitting the traditions and values of the college as well as a certain view on how a woman's college experience ought to be defined. The statement made was rather strong, that "no girl is a co-ed" until this courtship ceremony has taken place. This suggests that dating was viewed as integral to the college experience and particularly the college experience of women students, that a woman's college experience was in some way incomplete without having engaged in the ceremonies associated with courtship. After all, the handbook authors

⁴²Off to College with August and Ana: Your Student's Handbook, 1949-1950 (Augustana College, 1949), 9.

did not write that a man must be kissed by a woman in order for *him* to be a true college student. Instead it was women for whom dating and relationships were said to be a critical part of the experience and whose college experience was deficient without the trappings of courtship. Furthermore, the tradition was geographically and historically rooted by its association with the Bell Tower, both an historic feature of the campus landscape and a reminder of the college's roots as a Swedish Lutheran seminary. The Bell Tower tradition and its persistent appearance in handbooks of this period demonstrate that it was performing some important cultural work; by connecting the cultural landscape and history of the college to norms of heterosexual courtship, the Bell Tower tradition normatively asserted that women students were heterogamous and interested in dating, marriage, and children. By tying a physical symbol of campus history and identity to feminine norms, the Bell Tower tradition integrated those norms into a broader sense of what it meant to be a woman at Augustana. In these circumstances we can apply the thesis of Hobsbawm and Ranger. Because the college was an institution undergoing particularly rapid change, we can understand the invention of new traditions as an attempt to anchor the present in an imagined past to maintain continuity and cohesion and to inculcate norms related to white middle class femininity.

RECONSTITUTION OF FEMININE NORMS: CAMPUS QUEENS

Another important site for the reconstitution of feminine norms was the beauty contest. These contests traditionally served a number of functions, both cultural and social, in 20th century American life. Culturally, the beauty contest has been utilized to construct and enforce regional or racial identities. Historian Karen W. Tice holds that the beauty contest model, whereby women⁴³ contestants

⁴³Beauty contests and similar cultural formats have in later years included men and non-gender conforming individuals, but in the context of early and mid-century contests, women are the key demographic.

compete as individuals based on appearance or other desirable traits, has been successful in using women's bodies to construct various ideas of femininity for a public audience.⁴⁴ Socially, beauty contests have been used as tools for reinforcing unequal race, class, and gender-based orders by adopting and proliferating idealized and sanitized images of race, class, and femininity. At Augustana College in the postwar era, beauty contests were used to enact and enforce the college's traditionally Swedish ethnic identity in the face of change and to proliferate norms and conventions of white middle-class femininity which prevailed in American society more generally during that time. However, such depictions of gender do not align perfectly with patterns discussed in other scholarly sources because Augustana beauty contest winners were not explicitly referred to with regard to their physical qualities. Rather, they were often portrayed as serious students and future professionals.

Campus beauty contests, whose winners were frequently known as 'queens', 'princesses', or 'sweethearts' played a significant role in American college culture in the midcentury. Beginning in the 1920's campus beauty contests were inaugurated at a number of American college campuses. Such contests were created as a reaction to the increasing presence of women in higher education and attempted to insulate and reinforce hegemonic gender norms against threats to the status quo. According to Tice, "white women students needed to affirm that the development of their intellectual potential would not replace matrimony and childbearing nor threaten conventional gendered practices."⁴⁵ These contests were often used to make the academic careers of women into less intellectually serious affairs by direct reference to institutions of domesticity such as marriage and childbearing, and careers associated with subservience such as secretarial work. The assumption, implicit or explicit, was that beauty contest winners were considered exemplary candidates for the roles

⁴⁴Karen W. Tice, "Queens of Academe".

⁴⁵Karen W. Tice, "Queens of Academe", 252.

of wife, mother, secretary, or assistant. These are the qualities which such contests thus upheld as socially desirable.

Scholars from multiple sources agree that such contests were also used to reflect ideological and cultural points of view specific to certain regions, classes, and cultures.⁴⁶ Campus queens were also utilized to reinforce specific cultural identities through hosting of campus cultural events. Often this would involve choosing campus queens for the express purpose of hosting the event. Such hostess duties and the cultural identity which the event expressed were thus tied directly to the 'office' of campus queens. All of these social and cultural functions continued to be represented from the 1920's into the postwar period and beyond.

Campus queens were given a high degree of prestige both at Augustana and at other colleges during the postwar. They were often highly visible and represented the norms and conventions considered desirable. Thus, the values of the institution were reflected by campus queens. Historian Jon Gorgosz argues that, while dominant portrayals of campus queens centered on these traits, other traits were often emphasized which did not represent the dominant norms and conventions, traits such as academic success, campus involvement, and career ambition. At Augustana, college queens were often portrayed as serious students academically and professionally and as active participants in social life on campus. Augustana's student paper, the *Observer*, described the 1947 Homecoming Queen as a choir member, a participant in the Women's Athletics Association, and an active of the Chi Omega Gamma sorority,⁴⁷ while the 1950 Homecoming Queen was honored for being a member of student government, Biology Club, and Swedish Club.⁴⁸ Absent in portrayals of the queens of Augustana is the explicit use of beauty as a defining characteristic of queens as well as any connection between beauty

⁴⁶Discussed at length in both Tice, Karen W. "Queens of Academe" and Gorgosz, Jon. "She was a Sweetheart."

⁴⁷"Esther and Bud Reign as Augustana Homecoming Vi-Royalty", *Observer*, Rock Island, IL, October 17, 1947.

⁴⁸"Wald, Gustafson Reign as 1950 Vi-Royalty", *Observer*, Rock Island, IL, October 13, 1950.

contest winners and ideals of domesticity. The contest winners were depicted in the student newspaper and yearbook quite plainly with their class photos⁴⁹, a stark contrast to the glamor and formal style with which queens at other colleges were frequently depicted.⁵⁰ This broke with the idealization of beauty and domesticity which Tice argues campus pageantry was designed to promote. Indeed, the absence of beauty as an explicitly named characteristic of queens counters Gorgosz's assertion that the professional and academic credentials of queens were only ever emphasized in tandem with physical beauty.⁵¹ This is not to say that Augustana's contest winners were not judged based on physical characteristics or that they were not turned into physical objects for the dissemination of prescribed gender norms, but rather that there existed significant differences in how they were wielded as symbols of idealized femininity.

One way in which Augustana's queens do subscribe to wider trends witnessed in beauty contests was in the use of queens as "mute bodies," to use Tice's term. On other college campuses in the postwar period, queens were often crowned and wielded as symbols all without giving the individual a platform from which to speak. Certain exceptions to the norm existed in place like the historically black Kentucky State University where black queens often offered opinions on a number of topics relevant to campus and college life⁵², but the general trend, especially among historically white colleges like Augustana, was that the queen was silent. She was a symbol. Augustana queens usually made the front page of the *Observer* after their coronation. They were attended by descriptions of their involvement on campus, but only rarely their own words. The 1954 yearbook dedicates an entire two pages to the queens of that school year with only their names and titles displayed next to their

⁴⁹*Rockety-I: 1954*, Rock Island, IL, Spring 1954. 18-19.

⁵⁰Karen W. Tice, "Queens of Academe."

⁵¹Jon Gorgosz, "She was a Sweetheart." 197.

⁵²Karen W. Tice, "Queens of Academe." 258.

photographs.⁵³ Despite being public symbols of the college, the words of the women themselves remain absent.

In addition to serving the role of upholding prevailing gender norms, campus queens often engaged visibly with the campus as hostesses of student events. Augustana was no exception with queens elected to play host to the college's Friendship Fair, Inter-Fraternity Ball, and all-campus Christmas Party. These were visible roles as has been noted. The contest winners were announced in the paper along with their photographs on the front page. They were also accorded special mention in the yearbook. Several of the more prominent contests saw their winners featured numerous times in such publications. One noteworthy purpose these women fulfilled in their very public role was the promotion of a unique cultural identity for the college. Nowhere was this more apparent at Augustana than in the Saint Lucia contest.

Each year an Augustana coed was elected by the members of the student body to "reign" over the college's all-campus Christmas party in the costume and persona of Saint Lucia in an adaptation of a Swedish winter celebration. The annual crowning of Saint Lucia at Augustana dates to 1940 when its advent was announced with the headline "Campus Beauty To Be Selected As Christmas Saint."⁵⁴ Over the next decade Augustana's all-campus Christmas party, centered on the crowning of Saint Lucia, would continue to adopt further Swedish inspired symbolism, turning the event largely into an expression of ethnic identity.

In 1954, senior Carin Conradsen of Stockholm, Sweden would reign as Saint Lucia⁵⁵ and her picture, as had been the case for several years, would be printed on the front page of the *Observer*.

⁵³*Rockety-I: 1954*, Rock Island, IL, Spring 1954. 18-19.

⁵⁴"Campus Beauty To Be Selected As Christmas Saint," *Observer*, Rock Island, IL, December 5, 1940.

⁵⁵*Rockety-I: 1954*, Rock Island, IL, Spring 1954. 12, 24.

Conradsen's ethnic and national identity clearly demonstrates the value placed on Swedish identity. Conradsen, voted to portray Saint Lucia by her peers, was an obvious choice at a time when the college's Swedish identity was more important to maintain and more consciously crafted than it had been at any previous time. A fact barely mentioned in Carin Conradsen's reign as Saint Lucia was her birth and childhood in Copenhagen, Denmark.⁵⁶ Rather, everywhere and at all times she is referred to as a Swede. It seems as though Conradsen's Swedish credentials needed to be inflated so as to fit a prescribed notion of Swedish ethnic identity. Conradsen may very well have been ethnically Swedish, only incidentally raised in Denmark, or the picture of her ethnic identity could be more complex; her identity is not at issue. What is more interesting is the fact that it was deemed necessary to white wash her to be 'more Swedish.' This subtle act of white washing demonstrates concern about the maintenance of the college's Swedish identity at a time when colleges across the country were becoming ever more diverse in terms of race, class, and gender. This use of campus queens as symbols of cultural identity matches what other scholars have observed in similar cultural celebrations.

AUTHORSHIP OF NORMS

Who invented the women of Augustana? In this paper, I have often referred to actions taken by "the college" or the interests of "the college" as if it were one entity. At times, such a generalization is useful. The campus naturally functioned as a community with certain shared interests and values. However, such an approach is limiting in its complexity. When convenient, I have attempted to distinguish between actions taken by the college president, the Social Committee, or other historical actors, but such distinctions have not been made pointedly enough. In this section I will briefly consider

⁵⁶"Carin Reigns at Party," *Observer*, Rock Island, IL, December 17, 1953.

the subject of authorship in order to create a more nuanced portrait of Augustana community as one which contained numerous groups with interests that may have only incidentally intersected.

While certain acts of reconstitution had clear authors, others are more ambiguous in their authorship. The writings of President Bergendoff make clear his vision of the college as Christian in belief and in conduct. His desire to reinforce normative sexual behavior was a clear motivating factor behind the building of Westerlin Hall. Likewise, the descriptions of Saint Lucia pageant winners in the *Observer* clearly originated from student writers. In fact, the normative feminine characteristics enforces by the pageants were largely self-selected by students as most queens gained office through popular vote.

Other acts of reconstitution had more ambiguous origins. The authorship of the college handbooks is something of a case in point. At first it might seem that student authors bore responsibility for using the handbooks to promote the Bell Tower tradition. The handbooks were edited and illustrated by student members of the Social Committee. The fact that most editors and illustrators of the handbooks were women complicates the subject considerably as it forced us to consider the fact that reconstituted norms were not merely the product of a threatened male caste but rather the result of complex forces which allowed for women students to play a role in the reinscribing of gendered difference. Examining the dynamic of the Social Committee produces even more complication. Ostensibly student led with an executive board composed of students, and with the majority of committee members being students, the Social Committee was in reality dominated by its two faculty representatives, the Dean of Men and the Dean of Women. The committee typically met in the office of the Dean of Women, a fact which might seem incidental, but one which indicates a power dynamic observable in the meeting minutes of the Social Committee. The Dean of Men and the Dean of Women frequently brought matters before the committee for consideration, were regularly appointed the chairs

of subcommittees, and often directed the agenda of the committee as a whole. The recurrence of the Bell Tower tradition might, as I have argued, have resulted from its persistence as a cultural idea among students. Yet, it is possible that the tradition owed its persistence to the permanent positions of faculty on the committee from year to year.⁵⁷

The exact reality is difficult to suss out and the historical record offers little help. It is certain that such reconstituted norms *were* disseminated. The cultural impact of these norms is equally apparent when viewed in context. Their authorship however remains a complicated question. At best we can say that the project involved many constituencies on campus over several decades. Parts of this cultural project were certainly disseminated faculty-to-student and man-to woman as in the case of Bergendoff, but student-to-student and woman-to-woman dissemination of norms played an equally important role as in the handbooks. The relative importance of these depends mostly on point of view.

CONCLUSION

It must be noted that this project first and foremost discusses norms of behavior and their relation to group identity. It does not explore in any depth non-hegemonic narratives regarding femininity nor how any one individual or group of individuals might have related to prevailing norms or constructed new norms and identities that differed from these. The view of gender and sexuality in this paper is necessarily an exclusionary one. The time and place of our examination was itself exclusionary, and the task of examining femininity as it was narrowly defined by the postwar Augustana is essential for understanding the reconstitution of feminine norms. There was of course variance in gender and sexual expression among Augustana women as there is in any community or identity, no matter how

⁵⁷ Minutes of the Social Committee, February 26, 1946, Box 1, in MSS 52 Social Committee 1939-1948, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

rigidly defined. A small number of women of color did attend Augustana in this period, and people of non-dominant sexual and gender identity certainly did as well. But, women of Augustana were measured against a yardstick which was white, northern European, protestant, middle class, hetero-normative, and cis-normative. A project which places questions of non-dominant sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, or class at the heart of analysis would be a welcome antidote to the weaknesses found herein.

As has been stated, the constructed Augustana woman from 1945 to 1962 was white, preferably Swedish, protestant, preferably Lutheran, middle-class, socially heterogamous and physically asexual. This construction was reinforced through spatial control of sexual behavior, invented courtship traditions which emphasized connection to an imagined past, and campus pageantry which performed idealized femininity for a public audience. The college, as a community of many constituent parts, used these projects to enforce its norms and values as insulation against change and uncertainty. For the women students of Augustana during this time, this meant that while the doors of higher education were opening ever wider, a complex series of gendered norms, both local and national in origin, delineated what an Augustana woman could and could not be.